

Connecting suffragettes, technology and society: Caroline Haslett's international correspondence network

WRoCAH funded Collaborative Doctoral Award between the School of Philosophy, Religion & History of Science, University of Leeds, and the Archives of the Institution of Engineering & Technology.



UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS



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Project summary

One-time suffragette Dame Caroline Haslett (1895-1957) was arguably the most transformative woman of 20th Century Britain outside parliament. While her international work in promoting women's roles in engineering and industry is documented in 10,000+ surviving letters, there is as yet no systematic map of Haslett's global networking. This project is an opportunity to form a richer picture of both the overlapping women's organisations that Haslett led, and the international networking for women enabled by funding from the Caroline Haslett Memorial Trust.

Gertrude Entwisle (left), Ying Hsi Yuan (centre), and Caroline Haslett (right), at the Women's Engineering Society conference, 1943, courtesy of IET archives.



PhD Project description

This project explores the extensive correspondence to, from and about [Dame Caroline Haslett](#). An estimated 10,000+ items are held in the Archives of the Institution of Engineering & Technology plus collections in the [National Archives](#) & [LSE, home of the Women's Library](#). There may be additional international collections yet to be traced. Haslett's correspondence remains little studied beyond enquiries on her key role as first Secretary of the Women's Engineering Society (founded 1919) & first Director of the Electrical Association for Women (founded 1924). Initial archival surveys reveal a richer international picture of Haslett's support for women's initiatives in energy and business across Africa, Australasia, North America, Southern Asia and beyond.

Although interwar and post-war Britain are sometimes seen as retrogressive for women's rights and opportunities, Haslett's editing of 'The Woman Engineer' from 1919 and 'The Electrical Age for Women' from 1926 illustrate how women's agency did quietly help to accomplish considerable enduring technological feats, e.g. the BS 1363 three-pin safety plug (1947). Such stories of women's role in building a human-centred post-war material world are vital to complement stories of women's international peace and suffrage movements: this project could provide a study of national-international networks of women in the same period for both engineering and business.

Key research questions to be addressed might include:

- How did Haslett's early career enable her to build her authority as the UK's leading promoter of new electrical technologies and new professional opportunities for women?
- How does the correspondence illustrate Haslett's leadership of initiatives at the national and international level?
- What new stories of women's agency can be told from studying the letters in Haslett's correspondence?

Additional PhD supervision will be supplied by Dr Katie Carpenter, School of History, University of Leeds, and Ms Asha Gage at the IET Archives.

About The IET Library and Archives

The Institution of Engineering and Technology's mission is to inspire, inform and influence the global engineering community, supporting technology innovation to meet the needs of society. Its [Libraries and Archives](#) Designated collections support this role by granting public access to such key resources as the paper and online digitised versions of '[The Woman Engineer](#)' (journal of the Women's Engineering Society) and '[The Electrical Age \(for Women\)](#)' (magazine of the Electrical Association for Women).

Engagement, outreach, dissemination and impact initiatives

Research on the Haslett correspondence collections can support the IET's own developing public history as a global institution that brings together members from across the world.

This project will help to make Haslett's correspondence accessible and comprehensible to a much wider global audience. The student will work with the IET Archives team and the Women's Engineering Society Heritage Manager to promote research findings to wider public audiences via webinars, public lectures and social media campaigns co-hosted by the Women's Engineering Society.

As the IET works to promote engineering/technology as a career for women, this project will enhance the IET's story of Caroline Haslett as one of its most prominent past woman members.

Financial support

Studentships for doctoral research are 40 months in duration for full-time study. Awards are subject to satisfactory academic progress. Awards must be taken up in October 2025; no deferrals are possible as this is the final round of recruitment to WRoCAH CDAs. Awards will comprise fees at Research Council rates and a tax- and national insurance-free maintenance grant (£20,780 in 2025/26). The grant pays the fees at the Home/UK rate; international students are, however, eligible to apply for this Studentship, and the University of Leeds will cover the difference between the Home/UK and International fees. Awards may be taken up on a part-time basis if a student is eligible to undertake part-time study; international applicants may be required to study full-time under the terms of their visa.

Qualifications

Strong applicants will have a good first degree in an appropriate subject, as well as a Master's degree (or be working towards one), usually at Distinction level, or professional experience relevant to the scope of the project. We are looking for a well-qualified student with a background in any of the following disciplines: history of science and/or technology, women's history, gender history, social history, international history.

Requirements of the Studentship

This opportunity is being offered as a full time studentship but part time study may be an option subject to agreement with the supervision team.

WROCAH students are required to undertake a bespoke training package and to complete a Researcher Employability Project of at least a month and a Knowledge Exchange Project.

All WROCAH students must submit their thesis for examination with the funded period. This is a requirement of the Arts & Humanities Research Council, which provides the funding for WROCAH, and is a condition of accepting a Studentship.

Before applying for any WROCAH Studentship, please first ensure that you have read the WROCAH webpages about the WROCAH training programme and requirements, as well as other funding opportunities

<http://wrocah.ac.uk/>

How to apply

By 12 noon Wednesday 5 March 2025, applicants are required to submit to WROCAH an Expression of Interest, which should include:

1. A CV with details of academic qualifications
2. A covering letter comprising a two-page statement to convey your motivation and enthusiasm for the project, and to demonstrate your suitability for your intended PhD studies with the University and Project Partner.

The covering letter should specifically highlight the following:

- Your interest in the project and details on why you have chosen that University and Project Partner.
 - How you will apply your current skills, knowledge and experience to undertake a PhD and the approach you would take to develop the project.
 - How the project fits into your career plans and ambitions.
- 17 March 2025: decision on short-listing

The short-list of candidates to be invited for an interview will be announced on Monday 17 March 2025.

- *Short-listed candidates must complete a PhD programme application before interview.* If you are short-listed for an interview you will be sent details of how to apply for a place at the University of Leeds, School of Philosophy, Religion & History of Science. At that point you will need to submit the names and contact details of two referees, copies of transcripts of your academic qualifications and (if applicable) an IELTS certificate.
- Interviews will be held on Monday 14th April 2025.

Interviews will involve the academic supervisor, Project Partner supervisor and a member of the WRoCAH Studentships Committee. They will be conducted online.

For more information about this project contact:

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